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## Regionalism, Communalism, Secularism

### Regionalism

- Regionalism is defined as a strong feeling of love and patriotism towards a particular region or state within a country, to an extent that it is far different from and sometimes exceeds the love for and interest of the nation. It is the ideology of focusing on **social, political and economic** interests of a particular region and is encouraged when a particular identity marker is concentrated in a geographical region.
- It has a tendency to militate against nationalism and impede the process of national integration. A preference of a **region over nation produces** a sense of sub-nationalism and threatens balkanization or political division of one Nation into many.
- However, regionalism also has a positive side. It is a political attribute associated with people's love and loyalty for their region, culture, language, etc. with a view to maintain their independent identity.
- People cherish and celebrate their cultural diversity including language, food, festivals etc.
- For example, people of Punjab celebrate Baisakhi while people of Kerala celebrate Onam. Such feelings **for one's region can very well be in line** with the feeling of patriotism for the larger nation. For example, a feeling among people of being proud of their identities as a Tamil, a Punjabi, a Bengali or a Gujarati is not contrary to patriotism, until and unless they are less proud of being Indian or are hostile to people from other regions, thus keeping regional love above the love for the nation.
- Further, looking after a region's benefits like dealing with poverty and increasing industrialization or providing lucrative offers to industries to attract them there, does not qualify as regionalism unless it is being done to harm other states. India is a country with wide diversity and plurality.
- Regionalism is a common phenomenon resulting from this diversity. Some experts argue that regionalism manifested in coalition politics has made Indian democracy stronger and more representative.
- Regionalism is a phenomenon that precedes the independence of the nation. During the independence struggle, regionalism was not seen as a disruptive force to the idea of India as a nation, even though the **Indian National Congress** wanted to develop a sense of national unity among people, irrespective of the province of an individual.
- This is evident from the fact that the provinces in British India were drawn out of administrative convenience, yet the national movement rejected these divisions as artificial and promised linguistic principle as the basis of formation of states. In fact, in the Nagpur session, Provincial Congress Committees were formed on the basis of linguistic zones and did not coincide with the administrative divisions of the time.
- The bitter experience of partition had made the founding fathers averse towards regionalism. They felt carving out of states based on regional factors like language might act as a barrier in the process of nation building and might lead to disintegration. The prevalent idea among the political commentators at the time that a diverse nation like India would not survive added to the pressure. Since then regionalism has manifested in the following ways:
  1. **Drawing of state boundaries:** The Dhar Commission and JVP Committee rejected the linguistic province and this triggered the Vishal Andhra movement. After the death of Sriramulu the Centre was forced to carve out a separate Andhra state on the basis of language. Fazl Ali Commission broadly accepted the language as the basis of reorganization of states and eventually more reorganization followed.

2. **Regional Disparities:** Regionalism was effective in mobilizing people to protest against disparities among the regions of India and states like **Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Telangana** were drawn. States like Andhra Pradesh have also been demanding of Special Category status to fulfill the regional aspirations of the people. Also, there is an apparent identity divide between the North and South Indian states owing to their distinct cultures, languages, development status, etc.
3. **Secession from Indian Union:** Secession from Indian Union typically refers to state secession, which is the withdrawal of one or more **states from the Republic of India**. Examples include the Khalistan movement, post-independence efforts of Nawab of Junagadh and Nizam of Hyderabad to secede from India, Dravida Nadu Movement, etc. The 1980s saw a rise of regional aspiration outside the framework of the state as seen in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and North-East. In fact, on the issue of Citizenship amendment bill, people in Mizoram protested via threatening to accede to China.
4. **Inter-state river water disputes:** The inter-state river water disputes are one of the most contentious issues of Indian federalism today. For example, Cauvery water dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Mandovi river dispute between Karnataka and Maharashtra and Godavari river water dispute between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In extreme cases, they hamper the relationship between the disputing states. For instance, riots had erupted after Supreme Court ordered Karnataka to release water from the Cauvery river to Tamil Nadu.
5. **Inter-state boundary disputes:** Boundary disputes have arisen out of the formation of linguistic states as in the case of Belgaum (between Maharashtra and Karnataka)

and Chandigarh (between Punjab and Haryana), or due to ethnic and tribal fault lines as between Assam and Mizoram. In August 2021, clashes between Assam and Mizoram police led to firing on the inter-state boundary, which left at least 6 Assam police personnel dead and over 50 injured.

6. **Sons of the soil doctrine:** This doctrine ties people to their place of birth, calling them 'sons of the soil' and treats all others who live in that region as later settlers, occupiers and outsiders. There is fear among locals that outsiders will outnumber them threatening their demography, cultural and social life. For example, in Nagaland, the Nagas feel threatened by the arrival of Kukis and Meiteis. Even during COVID crisis, Chief Minister of Delhi raised concern that treatment to citizens living in Delhi was getting delayed at the city's hospitals due to 'outsiders' coming for cheaper treatment. The 'sons of the soil' movements have been more virulent in regions when there is actual or potential competition for industrial and middle-class jobs, between the migrants and the local youth, or due to a general scarcity of well-paying jobs. For example, the slogan of 'Maharashtra for the Maharashtrians' that was used to target migrants around 2008. Marathi natives staged massive demonstrations and protests against the migrants of UP and Bihar who would provide cheap labor and were perceived to be taking away from the job of natives.

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#### **CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION TO PROMOTE NATIONAL ONLY INTEGRITY**

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- Freedom of speech and expression (Art. 19) to express regional priorities and criticize the government if a region is being neglected.
- Fifth and sixth schedule to preserve tribal identity.
- Article 38 (DPSP) to deal with inequality in income status and opportunity among individuals and regions.
- Schedule 7 (division of power) between center and state to give more regional autonomy through state

- Eighth schedule recognized different regional languages in the constitution of India.
- Article 79 and 80 provisions of Rajya Sabha as Council of States.
- Article 368 amendment procedure for having ratification by half of the States if an amendment is affecting federalism.

Forms of Regionalism	
Separatism (Demand for separate state)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Separatism is a demand for separate statehood within the Indian Union. This kind of sub-regionalism was validated by the State Reorganization Act 1956.</li> <li>➤ E.g. Demands for the creation of Bodoland in Assam; Gorkhaland for ethnic Gorkha (Nepali) people in West Bengal; a Bundelkhand state (Covering part of MP and part of UP for promoting the development of the region)</li> </ul>
Demand for Full and Independent Statehood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The union territories have been forwarding such demands like the NCT of Delhi. E.g. Most of such demands have already been accepted. In 1971, Himachal Pradesh got the status of a full state and thereafter Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh (former NEFA) and Sikkim got full statehoods.</li> </ul>
The Demand for Regional Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Since the 1960's, with the emergence of regional parties, the demand for state autonomy has been gaining more and more strength due to the central political interference. E.g. The DMK in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, Telugu Desam party in Andhra Pradesh, Assam Gana Parishad in Assam, National conference in J&amp;K and Forward Bloc in West Bengal have been continuously demanding a larger share of powers for the states.</li> </ul>

#### Secessionism

- Secessionism is a form of regionalism that involves militant and fundamentalist groups advocating a separation from India on the basis of ethnicity or any other factor. E.g. NSCN (IM), Islamic fundamentalist groups in J&K, ULFA in Assam, Khalistan movement.

#### Other factors giving rise to regionalism:

- Regionalism is a strong attachment to one's own region. In addition to the regionalist manifestations mentioned above, it is a complex amalgamation of geographical, historical, cultural, economic, politico-administrative and psychological factors.
- For example, some states and regions are better in terms of development like infrastructure, healthcare, job opportunities, standards of living, etc. Such economic inequality can give birth to sub-regional movements.
- In fact, many people argue that the problem of Naxalism has its roots in economic deprivation of people belonging to regions that have remained beyond the pale of development. Even the formation of states like Jharkhand and Telangana was based on lack of development and unequal distribution of financial resources. Development deficit between economically prosperous Western Maharashtra and drought prone area in Vidarbha region of Eastern Maharashtra has given rise to demands for Vidarbha state.
- Indian politics and political parties are also very much responsible for regionalism in India. Regional parties and local leaders use the regional sentiments in order to capture power and this helps in preparing the ground for regionalism.
- They often project an imaginary threat from outsiders and promise their vote bank about securing their land, jobs and culture from outsiders. For example, regional parties like ADMK and AIDMK in Tamil Nadu secured power by promoting regional sentiments.



While some political movements arise from a demand of greater autonomy within a state. For instance, the demand for Gorkhaland in North Bengal districts, is to gain political autonomy from the State government, thus giving rise to regionalism.

- In a diverse country like India regionalism finds its essence in multiple languages, cultures, tribes and religions. Languages can help in integrating people and in providing emotional attachment to one's culture.
- Sometimes this emotional attachment translates into the demand for linguistic states. Language related riots have also taken place in the past such as the anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu during **1950s and 60s**. Moreover, the culture of the Indian population varies with respect to region.
- When a citizen from other cultural group offends these traditions or shows cultural insensitivity, there arises the seeds of conflict. Caste system also acts as an axis of consolidation for people. Caste attributes differing social status to different sections of the population which can create regional grievances. For Example, the Vanniyars of North Tamil Nadu have been demanding a separate state based on caste identity.
- India has a lot of ethnic diversity in different regions. These ethnic differences have at times formed the basis for demanding political autonomy and sometimes secession. For example, the Nagas of Nagaland are demanding a state based on their ethnic identity. Such demands often take the form of violent armed struggle with established parallel governments.
- Heading to sub-regional demands leads to domino effect and unnecessary fragmentation and administrative challenges. Moreover, violence, politicization and disturbance to law and order deters investors, undercuts potential for industrial development and hampers supply and demand. For **example, North Bengal's economy**, which is based on tea and tourism industries, slumped during Gorkhaland demands in 2017.
- Modern industry requires a large market of goods and factors of production, which only a united India, with freedom of mobility, employment and residence can provide. Such demands also lead to acrimonious relationships between different sections of society based on ethnicity, language etc. threatening the unity and integrity of India.
- For example, there was severe competition between Haryana and Punjab after the **creation of Haryana in 1966**.
- However, regionalism has helped in deepening federalism in India. It can be seen from the fact that even during the era of one party system of Congress, the regional aspirations forced the Centre to form a new state.
- It has also helped in ushering in the era of coalition politics where regional political parties held power in the Parliament as seen during the **NDA and UPA alliances**. It has led to democratic decentralization within the state as well, for example Ladakh was given the divisional status in Jammu and Kashmir and finally was created as a separate Union Territory.
- Democracy allows regional aspirations and does not look at them as anti- national, given that the aspirations are within the framework of the Constitution.
- Thus in the course of democratic politics regional aspirations get strengthened. But, regional demands should not manifest in a narrow sense as seen during the separatist movements and any disagreement must be ironed out with democratic dialogue and negotiations. Regionalism can in fact play a uniting force, like linguistic reorganization of states gave a uniform basis of drawing state boundaries and underlined the acceptance of the principle of diversity.

#### **Single time-zone across India:**

- For over a century, India has observed a single time zone. Due to the sheer size of the country, this has significant impacts on some of India's states, particularly in the Northeast. Leaders from the region argue that a separate time zone would increase daylight savings and efficiency.



- In the Northeast, the sun rises as early as four in the morning and in winter it sets by four in the evening. By the time government offices or educational institutions open, many daylight hours are already lost.
- In winter this problem gets even more accentuated and the ecological costs are a disaster with much more electricity having to be consumed.
- The National Institute of Advanced Studies claim that advancing IST by half an hour would result in saving 2.7 billion units of electricity every year. None of the other proposals such as the introduction of daylight saving time in India has met with any approval and it is felt that having two time zones would be unsuitable.
- Experts are of the opinion that two time zones are not advisable for India as it would cause 'unimaginable chaos', given the country's demographic size. People would have to adjust to multiple time zones & administrative integration would be difficult. Also, India's lifeline, the railways is not yet automated enough to handle time shifts mid-journey and this could induce major accidents due to human error.
- There is also a strong political dimension to granting a separate time zone in the Northeast given the region's long history of self-determination movements. The unstated assumption is that the grant of a different time zone is only the first temporal step towards conceding spatial autonomy.
- Daylight saving in north eastern states can be allowed to advance their clocks by some time (0.5-1 hour) to save more daylight hours. The move will not mean that time will slow down. But, the perception will change, and it would imply a delayed sunset. This will allow the citizens to make use of added daylight hours.
- For instance, Chai Bagaan time or tea time is an informal practice followed in tea gardens in Assam which is an hour ahead of IST.
- with an apparently good intention of ensuring equal industrial growth in all the regions of the country by subsidizing the movement of naturally occurring ores and minerals from one state/region to another.
- But this had the unintended dampening effect on the growth of industrialisation in the Eastern states like Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha since it weakened the incentives for the **private sector to establish production facilities in these areas.**
- The 1956 Industrial Policy resolution also highlighted that securing a balanced and coordinated development of the industrial and agricultural economy in each region can reduce regional inequality.
- Government incentives were therefore provided to the private sector to invest in backward areas through subsidies, tax concessions, licenses, permits and institutional loans at subsidized rates. Nationalization of Banks in 1969 and 1980 was done to promote financial inclusion in backward regions. Various Finance Commissions have tried to reduce disparity among states by preferential treatment to the poorer states and recommending them more grant allocation.
- Planning was used as an important tool to remove regional inequality and different five-year plans were adopted to overcome inequality.
- Migration of unskilled labour from the backward regions also contributes to regional disparity, but creates its own social, cultural and psychological cost for the migrants and their families.
- This can be mitigated by increasing ecosystem support for education, social and cultural security for such families and individuals.
- Schemes such as MGNREGA have been proved to have moderated inter-state migration at least partially by making economic opportunities available in close vicinity.
- Finance Commission can play an important role in bridging the gap of inequality. The focus should be given on Special Area Development Programme and expanding access to basic services. Aspirational District Programme is a

### Overcoming Regionalism

- The road to overcoming radical regionalism begins with overcoming regional inequalities.
- The Freight Equalization Policy was introduced by the government right after independence

step in the right direction, but eventually there is no alternative to industrial investments in under-served regions if the question of regional inequality has to be addressed substantially.

- Apart from government steps to reduce inequalities, even political parties should try to avoid partisanship. The appeals made to the electorate based on regional identity must be stopped. They should aim at bringing a national unity instead of pandering to factional interests.
- Some of the campaigns of government can also help in overcoming the regional factor such as Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat; Swadesh Darshan etc. The role of National Integration council must be revamped to address the problems of regionalism in India.
- Creating strong interdependence among states would help as each state would see another state as a partner in development.
- We have seen how regionalism could be good or bad for a nation as well for a group of nations.
- Constitution of India under Article-19 gives every citizen a fundamental right to move around and settle down peacefully in any part of the country. And, as a citizen of India, everyone should respect this fundamental right of every person and avoid stoking xenophobic passions, as a narrow regional outlook will doom our people to poverty. On the other hand, an integrative approach will enable social and economic development, the spread of education and further deepening of democracy to solve the issues underlying regional sentiments. The need of the hour is to develop each region of India, through devolution of power to local governments and empowering people for their participation in decision-making.

### Communalism

**Definition:** in a broad sense - means 'related to' or 'shared by' a community. However, it has a different context in India. It is a strong attachment to one's own community, and feeling of antagonism, hatred and hostility towards other communities or any specific community.

Bipin Chandra	Bipin Chandra, in his book, "Communsalism in Modern India", defines Communalism as an ideology based on the belief that Indian society is divided into religious communities, whose economic, political, social and cultural interests diverge and are even hostile to each other because of their religious differences.
Ram Ahuja	Communalism is a belief that is characterised by strong antagonism practiced by the members of one community against the people of another community. In some instances, this rivalry goes to the extent of harrasing and insulting members of a particular community and in extreme cases dishonoring women and even killing persons.

### Element Of Communalism

The community could be based on region, religion, language or any other identity, but often religion is the fundamental distinction that overrides all other communal identities. Communalism is based on a belief that people following different religions have irreconcilable social, political and economic interests. It has the following characteristics:

1. **Communalism views one's own group** as the only legitimate and worthy group, while other groups are held as inferior and illegitimate. This drives one towards promoting orthodox tenets, intolerance and prejudices against a community, and results in discriminatory treatment of individuals from that community.
2. Communalism has a **political angle as well**. A communal person may or may not be religious but he/she bases their political identity on religion. Communalism perverts religion and converts it into a political constituency.
3. Communalism claims that **religious identity overrides** every other identity (class, caste, gender, economic, linguistic, ethnic or national identity etc.)
4. Communalists are unwilling to accept the belief pattern and faiths of other communities and promote unity of community against other communities. It is in direct conflict with the concept of pluralism and integration.

5. Communalism is also pro-violence. The emotional baggage carried over by communalism turns a crowd into a mob. Lynching, riots etc. happen as a result.

***Communal tensions appear in different societies depending upon their cultural history.***

- **Ancient India** was a multi-religious society, but there was no hatred against anyone's religion. It had a pluralistic culture and religious tolerance.
- Kings patronized religions and religious institutions other than their own, for example Kumaragupta-a proclaimed Vaishnava - established the **Nalanda Mahavihara, a center of Buddhist learnings.**
- However, few incidents of religious intolerance were also seen such as persecution of Vaishnavas by **Kulothunga Chola**, a Shaivite king. But it is hard to find any parallels of such incidents in ancient India. With the arrival of Islam in medieval India, the native religions were often suppressed.
- Temples were converted into mosques as a mark of conquest. There was religious as well as racial discrimination.
- However, despite the intolerant regime, the relations among people continued to be harmonious with absence of communal feelings among them.
- There were exceptions among the ruling class as well such as the **Mughal Emperor Akbar**, who was an epitome of secular outlook and believed in propagating interreligious understanding. He abolished the **Jajiya tax** which discriminated against Hindus.
- Further, the colonial period saw increasing mobilization of people. The Britishers also saw the 1857 revolt as a Hindu-Muslim conspiracy against them.
- Because of Mughal rule and the revolt under the assumed leadership of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the colonial government began to be suspicious towards Muslims and started patronizing Hindus.
- In fact, after the suppression of revolt British officials took a vindictive attitude towards the Muslims. For example, they hanged 27,000 Muslims in Delhi alone. But this attitude

changed in the 1870s when they started following the policy of divide and rule as a tool to keep their political stranglehold over the country.

- Moreover, amongst the common masses, religion was also usually the first method to mobilize public opinion against the British, such as through large scale celebrations of Ganesh Chaturthi and Shivaji Jayanti by **Bal Gangadhar Tilak.**
- But it also meant that clashing communal interests now degenerated into riots, which enlarged the gulf of distrust between communities. Eventually, communalism emerged as a new and modern political system based on people's participation and mobilization. This was evident from the transformation of religious consciousness to communal consciousness among some sections of people.
- The economic policies followed by the British resulted in deprivation among masses and competition for the resources. The British acted in a biased and prejudiced manner in matters of government services and promotions.
- For example- the Hindu community improved their social and economic status by modern education and subsequent employment in British services while Muslims remained aloof and suffered from backwardness and degradation. From the very beginning, upper caste Hindus dominated colonial services as they adapted early to colonial structure.
- Thus, a huge imbalance was created between the two communities. This resulted in resentment among Muslims in the late 19th century and they then formed a pressure group under Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to bargain as a separate community.
- The first visible signs of British divide and rule policy can be traced from the partition of Bengal in 1905 where they promoted provincialism by talking of Bengali domination. They also provided support in the formation of Muslim League with religious agenda to counter Indian National Congress. Further, British



strategy of providing separate electorate to Muslims under Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 too resulted in Hindu-Muslim conflict.

- In several parts, religious distinction coincided with social and class distinction, causing communal distortion. For example, in western Punjab at that time, Muslim landlords opposed Hindu moneylenders while in eastern Bengal, **Muslim jotedars opposed Hindu zamindars**.
- The Britishers also started accepting communal organizations and leaders as the real spokesperson of communities and adopted a policy of non-action against communalism.
- Gradually religiosity became a major contributory factor and it started intruding into the non-religious and non-spiritual areas of life and also beyond the individual's private life.
- Religious revivalism movements in India like the Shuddhi movement among Hindus and Tabligh and Tanzim among Muslims also contributed to polarization.
- The **period between 1923 to 1930** witnessed multiple communal riots in India. Also, political positions such as seats in legislative councils, municipal bodies etc., were provided based on the communal considerations. This communal policy was continued by the British through Communal award in 1932, and to the partition in 1947.
- Manipulation of religious sentiments became prominent during British rule which accentuated religious and cultural differences between the Hindus and Muslims and led to the consolidation of separate communal identities. The British historians also provided a communal and distorted view of Indian history.
- For example- British historian, **James Mill designated** the ancient period of Indian history as the Hindu period (based on Hindu rulers) and the medieval period (1200 AD – 1757AD) as the Muslim period (based on Muslims rulers). It was also described that in the medieval period, there was subjugation and oppression of Hindus.

### **After independence, several incidents have accentuated communalism in India**

- Hindu-Muslim riots after partition, Anti-Sikh riots 1984, demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, Godhra Riots 2002, Muzaffarnagar riots in Uttar Pradesh in 2013, Delhi riots 2020, etc.
  - Vote bank politics and politics appeasement followed by political parties made communal divisions even more stark. For example, Rath yatra, Shah Bano judgement by court which was overturned by central government through Muslim Women's Act in early 1986.
  - In the contemporary times, issues like conversion and reconversion (Ghar wapsi), emergence of inter-religious marriages (Love-Jihad controversy), religious sentiments related to cow-slaughter (Dadri lynching), misrepresentation of historical evidence, sensationalization of news by media etc. have polarized the society and has resulted in communalism in Indian society.
  - Communalism is especially a significant issue in India because it has been a recurrent source of tension and violence. Though the remnants of communalism belong to colonial times and they can be traced out in contemporary times as well, such incidents could not disturb the harmony of India. This is due to the values of morality and tolerance which are inbuilt in the character of India.
- Contemporary communalism:**
- Communalism which started as a religious conflict between two religions, continued even after partition and exists in society after decades since independence. Political opportunism can be cited as a major reason for this.
  - With the continuing absence of a uniform civil code, there is a deepening perception that different religious communities have divergent and contradictory interests. Consequently, community-based pressure groups bargain for their own community. At the political level, these communities compete for power and resources.
  - This competition, in turn, escalates into a major social divide. Politicians try to turn communities into vote banks and

different communities become watertight compartments.

- External elements (including non-state actors) also have a role in worsening the problem of communalism as such elements try to stoke internal unrest and social instability in India.
- Politics and connivance of international elements combined with socio-economic conditions has turned contemporary communalism into a serious domestic issue. In fact, it is no more a religious conflict but now it encompasses other spheres of Indian life.

#### **Uniform Civil Code:**

- Article 44 of the Indian Constitution refers to the creation of a uniform civil code for the citizens of the country. To give effect to this provision, in the initial years of independence, Prime Minister Nehru had introduced the Hindu Code bill into the Parliament but was met with a huge opposition.
- Hindu Code bill was meant to provide a civil code in place of the Hindu personal law that governed systems like marriage, adoption, re-marriage, hereditary rights, etc. However, it was perceived as an attack on the Hindu religion.
- **Nehru** was also criticized for being soft on the Muslim minority and not including them under the purview of the civil code, as was originally envisaged in the Constitution. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, had wanted to reassure the Muslims who had chosen India and decided to stay back.
- He believed that the roots of Communalism in India are a remnant of colonial socio-economic political structure.
- Examine **“Contemporary communalism is more than a conflict between religious communities.”** the majority had a duty towards the minority and it would be wise to offer concessions to make them feel at ease.
- The controversy, finally was resolved when the Hindu Code Bill was broken down into three subsidiary bills- **The Hindu Marriage Bill (outlawed polygamy and gave provisions for inter-caste marriages and divorces), The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Bill;**

**and The Hindu Succession Bill. Members of Buddhist, Jain, Christian and Sikh communities also fall under the purview of these laws.**

- There are still demands for the passing of a Uniform Civil Code in order to bring all religions under the same civil laws and also to empower women who are sometimes at a disadvantage due to personal laws of religions.

#### **Causes of communalism:**

- Communalism has diverse underlying causes. Social and cultural differences, for example between the Hindus and the Muslims, result in one treating the cow as sacred while the other treating it as food and sacrificial animal.
- Conversion is another social factor in communalism. The Constitution has provided the citizens the freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion but when this freedom is used to aggressively increase the influence of one religion over others through conversion, it creates an unhealthy tension between religious communities.
- Economic inequality is another significant ground which projects the interests of two communities as not only distinct, but conflicting as well. A majority of Muslims in India lack scientific and technological education.
- Due to their educational backwardness, they have not been represented sufficiently in public service, industry, and trade etc. This creates a sense of relative deprivation and inequality which prepares the ground for communal feelings through a justification of the community having been side-lined by the state.
- Vote bank politics is another way through which the interests of the communities are projected to be distinct. Use of religious appeals to mobilize people electorally creates a slippery slope for communalization of politics. It can lead to dehumanization of a section of society through political indoctrination.
- Also the government's policy of appeasement of minorities to give them **confidence has backfired.** There has been an increase in communal feelings amongst the majority

population for being sidelined and ignored as equal partners in the development process.

- There are psychological reasons as well, behind the growth of communal sentiments. A feeling of insecurity might arise among minorities simply due to not belonging to a majority community, or a feeling of exclusion might arise because of lack of easy bonding and friendship between the two communities in society, or due to constant bickering between them.
- Moreover, lockdown imposed isolation during the pandemic, also reduced social interactions between people belonging to various communities, which earlier acted as mediums to bridge the divide. As a result, few adverse incidents were extrapolated to stereotype the entire community. For example, the ghettoization of **Tablighi Jamaat and Sikhs** in Nanded (Maharashtra) as corona spreaders.

### Secularism

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any” — Mahatma Gandhi

Secularism is understood as separation of state from religion, or more broadly as zero interference of the state in the matters of religion, and vice-versa. What this implies is that the state treats all citizens equally, without any special consideration for anyone's religion.

Secularism, as a concept, originated in Europe during the period of renaissance. Its origin is traced to reaction against the oppression by the church in the name of religion. Secularism, therefore, sought to separate state from religion. But secularism, as understood in India, has implied giving equal respect to all religions, in line with the practices of the land since time immemorial. India is a birthplace for major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism. And Indian society also welcomed faiths and beliefs originating in other lands like Islam and Christianity which, over time, have become a feature of Indian society itself. It originated in the ancient Vedic period based on religious pluralism and later evolved by Ashoka's dhamma, Akbar's sulh-e-kul etc. Even then, the priests and religious heads purely had religious

and moral functions and were not involved in administrative affairs of the State. The modern background of secularism in India has a colonial context though. During British

### Why is it important to separate religion from the State?

- Secularism prevents the majority population belonging to one religion from oppressing the minority and allows minorities to practice their religion. If the majority religious group has access to State power, then it could quite easily use this power and financial resources to discriminate against and prosecute persons of other religions.
- This tyranny of the majority could result in discrimination, coercion and at times even genocide. For instance, state persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar, who belong to a different religion than Buddhism-the majority religion. Any form of domination based on religion is in violation of the rights that a democratic society guarantees to each and every citizen irrespective of their religion. In addition, we also need to protect the freedom of individuals to exit from their religion, embrace another religion or have the freedom to interpret religious teachings differently. A state which maintains a safe distance from religion becomes a protector for such individuals. Also, contemporary world history has shown us how wars have been fought by the State in the name of religion. This is also evident from the current precarious situations in West Asia which is bearing the brunt of religious jihad.

### The western model of secularism:

- The western model of secularism ensures the separation between political institutions and religion and this separation means complete separation where the state does not interfere in religious affairs at all and religion also does not intervene in the affairs of the state. It originated in response to rampant corruption in the Church as well as its unwarranted interference in state affairs during the Dark Ages. The philosophy of western secularism solely focuses on the rights of a citizen to follow the religion of their choice. Religion and states have a separate sphere of its own. In the



western model of secularism, no public policy will be drafted on the basis of religion. The state cannot aid any religious institution nor it can give any financial support to educational institutions run by religious communities. The State doesn't intervene in the affairs of religion till the time religion is working within the limits of the law. For example, if a religion does not allow the woman to become a priest, then the state can do little about it. If the religion does not allow some community to enter its temple, then the state cannot do anything about it. The State does not give community-based rights or minority rights. This was because; most of the western societies were religiously homogeneous except for the presence of Jews. So, they focused on individual freedom and equality and inter-religious issues were neglected.

#### **Indian model of secularism:**

India is a country comprising of various religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism etc. Secularism in practice is one of the most important achievements of independent India as it has ensured equal treatment of people in all aspects regardless of their caste, religion, beliefs, etc. Indian secularism is attributed to the fair and equal treatment of all religions and treating them all as one under the law. For example, Delhi government scheme - Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana which provides state funded visit to pilgrimage sites for elderly people. Keeping its deep-rooted diversity in mind, Indian secularism focused on equality. It opposed the oppression of women and Dalits within Hinduism or Indian Islam or Christianity. It deals not only with the religious freedom of individuals but also with the religious freedom of minority communities. Within it, the individual has the right to profess the religion of his/her choice. Religious communities have a right to exist and establish their own culture and educational institutions. We have state-supported religious reforms.

#### **Recently Supreme Court judgment allowed the entry of women in Sabarimala Temple, Kerala.**

The Bombay High Court judgment opened Haji Ali Dargah to women. Indian secularism interferes in religion to strike down ill practices of religion and also upholds other fundamental rights. For example, triple talaq has been banned by law. Similarly, our Constitution has banned untouchability, it has also enacted several laws like abolishing child

marriage and also allowing inter-caste marriage within Hinduism.

India has adopted a **very sophisticated policy of religious equality**. It has chosen a positive mode of engagement. State does not owe loyalty to any particular religion nor does it itself uphold any religion as state religion. It is not irreligious or anti-religious but gives equal freedom and protection to all religions. It grants all religious minorities the right to establish and maintain their own educational institutions which may receive assistance from the state. The **7th schedule of Indian Constitution** places religious institutions, **charities and trusts into Concurrent List**, which means that both the central government of India, and various state governments in India can make their own laws about religious institutions, charities and trusts. These strategies are adopted by the state to promote values of peace, freedom, and equality. The Indian Constitution allows for principled state intervention. It means that the state will intervene when its principles of freedom, equality, and peace will be hindered.

Thus, the conception of **Indian and Western models** is vastly different due to differences in time and space of evolution. Each developed largely indigenously so the respective models are suited to their own socio- political needs. As per Ashis Nandy, a better term to explain **Indian secularism** is using the term religious tolerance rather than redefining it through the prism of Western model of secularism. However, with greater migration of refugees and immigrants to the West, the West is beginning to resemble India. Hence, the **current Western conception of secularism** is proving to be myopic as it is overlooking multiculturalism. The Indian model of religious pluralism could hold a lesson for the west that has mired itself in religious stereotyping leading to discrimination and a divided society. Islamophobia for example has been seen to have become a recognised cause of proliferation of terrorist organisations like ISIS. Also, with increasing globalization religiously varied societies have come closer making it necessary to respect different religions along with providing space for their expression. This Indian System of secularism could be a guiding light for the overly radicalized form of secularism of the

west. It could curb the growing xenophobia in the locals, and the threat perception in the migrants. Only because of this system has India managed to keep together the land of 30 million Gods. The idea of '**Sarva Dharma Sambhav**' thus, needs to become a global maxim to sustain social ties in an increasingly global world.

### **The Indian Constitution and secularism:**

As per the Indian Constitution, the State itself does not have any religion. It gives equal importance and extends equal opportunities to all religions, allowing all of them equal opportunities to co-exist and flourish.

The preamble of the Indian Constitution reflects the philosophy of the constitution as it secures to all citizens of India liberty of belief, faith and worship. **Other provisions include:**

1. The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection of the laws (Article 14).
2. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of religion (Article 15).
3. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters of public employment (Article 16).
4. All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate any religion (Article 25).
5. Every religious denomination or any of its section shall have the right to manage its religious affairs (Article 26).
6. No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes for the promotion of a particular religion (Article 27).
7. No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution maintained by the State (Article 28).
8. Any section of the citizens shall have the right to conserve its distinct language, script or culture (Article 29).
9. All minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice (Article 30).
10. The State shall endeavor to secure for all the citizens a Uniform Civil Code (Article 44).

### **Critical view Indian secularism:**

1. **Western Import:** A major criticism is that secularism in India is borrowed from the west

and doesn't suit Indian culture. But given that we successfully adopted parliamentary democracy from the west and molded it in an Indian way to suit our interest, this criticism is not well rounded. In the west, it was the Church-state separation which was central and in countries such as India, the idea of peaceful coexistence of different religious communities has been important.

2. **Minoritism:** Another criticism is that Indian secularism favors minorities for no historical reasons unlike Europe where many minority nationalities got boxed into territorial nation-states. However, in the Indian constitutional scheme, the special arrangement by the states intends to treat minorities with the same respect and dignity with which all others are being treated. Here the rights of minorities need not be nor should be viewed as special privileges.

3. **Interventionist:** Indian secularism is said to be coercive with excessive interference with the religious freedom of communities. But Indian secularism is not based on the traditional notion of total separation between religion and state. Indian secularism justifies interference on the grounds such as a personal law treating women unequally and unjustly, being against morality or public health such as human sacrifice or animal cruelty. The state here acts as a facilitator by supporting liberal and democratic voices within every religion.

4. **Anti-religious:** Some experts argue that Indian secularism is anti-religious. But Indian secularism is against institutionalized religious domination and this can't be dubbed as being anti-religious. It is also said that Indian secularism threatens religious identity. But the intention of Indian secularism is to promote religious freedom and equality. Although dogmatic, violent, fanatical, exclusivist and hatred-fostering beliefs and practices are intended to be suppressed. The real question is not whether something is undermined but whether what is undermined is intrinsically worthy or unworthy.

There are several factors acting as hindrance to the secular fabric of India. The polarization of people on religious lines, appeal to religion and caste based identities even for secular interests by political leaders and parties is a big cause for concern. For example, riots such as in Muzaffarnagar, Kandhamal, and Gujarat, etc.

Moreover, rationalism, science are opposed by clergy, vested interests and feudal elements so as to perpetuate their monopoly. Religious revivalism and fundamentalism, missions of conversions and re conversions also drive people to narrow mind-sets. Failure of the government in creating just economic order leading to poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, population explosion, environmental pollution, jobs has led to a sense of injustice. Not only this, attempts to subvert history, distorting textbooks affect young minds negatively.

Neighbouring countries are many times instrumental in fanning communalism, terrorism in country. eg state sponsored terrorism by Pakistan, ISIS, etc. India today has more than 200 million users on social media, which has also become a handy tool to disseminate hate speeches, fake news and hence communal propaganda.

#### **Strengthening peace and harmony in Indian society:**

States should tackle riots with promptness, grit and determination. Adequate manpower deployment, detailed standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans should be kept ready in sensitive/hypersensitive areas. Economic disparities should be reduced by dedicated efforts in job creation for youth. Legislature should strengthen hands of Election Commission to bar parties and individuals making religious appeals to voters even during non-election period. Inter-religious education at school level with emphasis on sacrifices and hardships of all religious communities and their contribution towards freedom and development of the country need to be focused in the books of history. Community festivals like Durga Puja in West Bengal (wherein different communities participate in idol making etc.) could be utilized to enhance cooperation among people. We should abide by **Article 51A of our Constitution which states it is a fundamental duty** of every citizen to promote harmony among people transcending religious diversities. We should not pay heed to hate speeches online and people should be sensitized to differentiate between free speech and hate speech.

UN has declared the 1st week of February as **“World Interfaith Harmony Week”**. It should be celebrated at all social gatherings and issues such as processions, use of loudspeakers, interfaith marriages should be dealt with a mature mind-set under guidance of laws. Revival of the National Integration Council (NIC 1960) and **National Foundation for communal harmony (NFCH 1992)** and their regular meetings is the need of the hour.

Justice delayed is justice denied, therefore, judicial remedies should be prompt and effective so as to instill confidence among people. The criminal justice system in the country should be made free from politicization and graft. Media is one of the main stakeholders in ensuring peace. Curbs on dissemination of hateful material on social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and mainstream media should be put into place. Editors' guild should **make self-regulations** in this regard both for unbiased coverage and for a ban on provocative headlines and non-factual reporting. India is a nursery of many blended cultures, it is hope of all exploited races on Earth, therefore it is high time to bring **Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill, 2011**, back to table so that responsibility could be fixed for any untoward incident and communal harmony could be secured.

Given the issues of **communalism and the diversity and plurality of India**, adoption of secularism has been a blessing as people can express their opinions freely. Being part of their identity, people can openly profess or practice the religion of their choice or choose not to practice any religion at all. But it needs to be understood that any state cannot be truly secular with secularism just written in its books. The ideology has to be accepted with grace by society and implemented with equal application for all sections of the people, and all communities. Keeping a check on the governmental bodies for any unfair use of religious influence to gain power is also needed. The young generation can more fully embrace the importance of the concept of secularism if they are taught about the struggles and sacrifices of our countrymen in establishing and sustaining a pluralistic, modern Republic of India. As a popular song from yesteryears goes: **‘hum laaye hain toofan se kashti nikaal ke, tum desh ko rakhna mere bachchon sambhaal ke’**.